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the Origin of an American Myth
(1902-1905)

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Silencing Sacagawea:
Eva Emery Dye & the Origin of an American Myth (1902-1905)

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Introduction

Sacagawea. A woman whose knowledge of the Rocky Mountain terrain made her an ideal guide for a band of route-seeking American men. A native girl whose willful contact with white men opened a cultural bridge to the land and peoples of the West. A mother whose very presence gave security, comfort, and peace to the wayward men of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. A young Shoshone woman of great strength, courage and



resilience—without whom the Lewis and Clark Expedition might not have succeeded. Embodied spirit of the American nation’s unstoppable, forward-moving, culture-fusing history. Quintessential American heroine.

I have just described a familiar character in a fundamental American script two centuries in the making. Knowledge of Sacagawea rises from a collective national understanding—from third grade history classes to heritage monuments to the stalwart image depicted on the gold dollar coin. She is not a contentious figure—neither vague nor ambiguous. Her place is well cemented into the foundation of American history.

It is precisely the historical standpoint, however, from which Sacagawea should be ambiguous and vague. Our only recorded evidence of her character is from the Lewis and Clark journals, a decided outside—free, white, male—perspective on her experience. Nowhere can we find her voice, for she left no written text. Nowhere can we find her image, for no visual re-creation of her survives. Just as the image on the golden dollar is an educated guess at her

appearance,¹ our national understanding is an educated although rather elastic re-construction of a sparsely recorded historical person. Even her name—*Sacagawea*—is a mere stand-in. During her lifetime, it is probable that she was called many different things. Aside from the various spellings and pronunciations of the name we use today (*Sacajawea*, *Sakakawea*), there exist names not encompassed by the limits of her myth (*Porivo*, *Bazil's Mother*).² It was only in 1910 that the United States Bureau of Ethnology declared her officially *Sacagawea* so a recognizable name could be attached to her monuments.³ This attempt stands among many in the quest to standardize the identity attached to an elusive Shoshone woman of many names, and it serves to illustrate how the *Sacagawea* we know today is, in essence, a historical myth.

The aim of this project is to add to the complex discussion brought about by this question: How did the spirit of this Shoshone woman emerge from the pages of a few tattered journals and solidify as a shining, courageous heroine on our national dollar and in our national mindset?⁴ Scholars provide many theories pertaining to how and why *Sacagawea's* myth was conceived, transformed, and maintained.⁵ Although many have identified *Sacagawea's* myth as

¹ A modern day Shoshone woman, Randy'L He-dow Teton, was used as a model for the golden dollar coin. The artist—Glenna Goodacre—wanted an authentic representation of *Sacagawea*, since none exist from her lifetime. Teton is now hailed as “the modern face of *Sacagawea*.” A biography of Randy'L He-dow Teton—which compares her “great inner strength” and her “quite, forceful” leadership to *Sacagawea's*—is available, with a other information regarding the coin and *Sacagawea*, on her website. “Millennium Dollar *Sacagawea* Coin: Randy'L Teton,” accessed November 29, 2011, www.faceofgold.com.

² Virginia Scharff, “Seeking *Sacagawea*,” in *Twenty Thousand Roads*, ed. Virginia Scharff (Los Angeles: University of California Press, Ltd., 2003), 15-16. See for a discussion of *Sacagawea's* many names, and the resulting impact on her identity as it has been constructed over the past two centuries.

³ Irving W. Anderson, “The *Sacagawea* Myth: Her Age, Name, Role, and Final Destiny,” *Columbia Magazine* Vol. 13, No. 3 (Fall 1999): 3. The decision was based on the fact that all attempted spellings of her name in the Lewis and Clark journals have a hard “g” sound. I use this name (“*Sacagawea*”) throughout, hoping it will serve the same function as the image of the coin—allowing people to understand the extent of her myth and how it permeates every person's understanding of history.

“*Sacajawea*” is frequently used in articles and sources I cite, and that is why it also appears in this piece.

⁴ Two main studies of *Sacagawea's* myth as a whole exist in today's scholarship. Ella E. Clark and Margot Edmonds, *Sacagawea of the Lewis & Clark Expedition* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, Ltd., 1979). See for the first extended identification and compilation of *Sacagawea's* myth. See Donna Barbie Kessler, *The Making of Sacagawea: A Euro-American Legend* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 2. See for a thorough analysis of the myth's development and a discussion of how it addresses “the needs of Euro-American society.”

⁵ Michael Heffernan and Carol Medlicot, “A Feminine Atlas? *Sacagawea*, the Suffragettes and the Commemorative Landscape in the American West, 1904-1910,” *Gender, Place, and Culture* Vol. 9, No. 2 (2002), 109-131; Thomas P. Slaughter, “*Porivo's* Story” in *Exploring Lewis and Clark: Reflections on Men and Wilderness* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2003); Laura E. Donaldson, “Red Woman, White Dreams: Searching for *Sacagawea*,” *Feminist Studies* Vol. 32, No. 3 (October 2006), 523-533; Donna

an Anglo-American construction, few have sought to fully explain the ways in which the myth was crafted, utilized, and maintained. With an aim at focus and depth, I will be examining what some consider the very conception of the myth⁶—Eva Emery Dye’s (1855-1947) portrayal of Sacagawea in her 1902 novel *The Conquest*, and Dye’s subsequent involvement in the 1905 dedication of the first Sacagawea statue in Portland, Oregon as a monument to promote woman suffrage in a progress-oriented West.

Three questions guide this project, and thus my argument is also three-fold. First, how is Sacagawea represented in the early beginnings of her myth? Dye creates a model heroine for her time by presenting Sacagawea as a civilizing mother figure whose ethnicity is ambiguous and malleable. Second, why was this particular representation important to the Oregon suffrage cause? In the male-dominated narrative of manifest destiny and westward expansion, Dye’s Sacagawea—a courageous and civilizing mother—gives (white) women a past and present voice. Third, what are the implications of these early representations on our understanding of Sacagawea in American history? This first depiction, and roles into which she is placed, effectively silences and ignores the young Shoshone woman’s actual experience to instead produce a social, politically, and poignantly effective American heroine.

Eva Emery Dye and *The Conquest*—Writing the Myth

After her journey with Lewis and Clark from November 1804 to August 1806, Sacagawea’s story settled itself deep within the journals of the expedition. For a full century, the spirit of her participation in the Corps of Discovery lay quiet and her experience remained unimportant to the selective eyes of various editors, scholars, and historians. Eva Emery Dye, a feminist author from Portland at the turn of the century, was the first curious reader in one

Barbie, “Sacagawea: The Making of a Myth,” in *Sifters: Native American Women’s Lives* ed. Theda Perdue (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2001), 60-67; Ron McCoy, “She of Myth and Memory,” *World & I* Vol. 17, No. 3 (March 2002), 160-170; Anderson, “The Sacagawea Myth”; Scharff, “Seeking Sacagawea”; Pennie L. Magee, “What Ever Happened to Sacagawea? The Debate between Grace Hebard (1861-1936) and Blanche Shroer (1907-1998),” *Heritage of the Great Plains* Vol. 37, No. 1 (January 2004), 27-39.

⁶ Sheri Bartlett Browne, *Eva Emery Dye: Romance with the West* (Eugene: University of Oregon Press, 2004), 4, 72; Kessler, *The Making of Sacagawea*, 81.

hundred years to perceive the young Shoshone mother who joined the expedition at Fort Mandan as significant⁷—enough so to siphon her from the annals of history and recreate her for the public.

Dye's discovery of Sacagawea was no coincidence. Already a published author of historical fiction in 1900, Dye went in search of a new history to put into novel form. Based on rumors of a 1905 Lewis and Clark centennial exposition to be hosted in Portland, Dye knew she had found "a potential best-seller" in the Corps of Discovery.⁸ "I struggled along...trying to find a heroine," Dye admits in her journal. Her research took her—hungry for a compelling female role—to the Lewis and Clark journals⁹: "Finally I came upon the name of Sacajawea, and I screamed, 'I have found my heroine!'"¹⁰ Having compiled her cast of characters, Dye proceeded to write an embellished version of the Lewis and Clark story based on factual research yet full of invented dialogue, emotion, and character development. What resulted was the first work of historical fiction to feature Sacagawea as an important figure on the Lewis and Clark expedition.

Before I move on to an analysis of Sacagawea's portrayal in Dye's account, it is important to situate the novel within its author's social context. Although Dye is known as a loud proponent of women's rights, she is by no means a radical figure. On the contrary, her understanding of the woman's role in society was slightly more conservative than many of her counterparts in the Oregon and national suffrage movements, and dominant feminist themes of

⁷ Heffernan et al., "A Feminine Atlas?," 2. See for further discussion on why Sacagawea's character remained virtually silent for a century. The authors argue that Sacagawea's invisibility before 1900 reflected, not just "the prejudice of white misogynist male historians," but "the prejudice of white Americans in general against a people who stood inconveniently in the way of the nation's 'historic destiny,'" 2. See also Kessler, *The Making of Sacagawea*, 63.

⁸ Browne, *Eva Emery Dye*, 77.

⁹ Kessler, *The Making of Sacagawea*, 67. Dye "discovered" the figure Sacagawea when reading the Coues edition of the journals, and she used this edition to guide the narrative of her novel *The Conquest*. She also used original copies of the journals in her further research.

¹⁰ Clark et al., *Sacagawea of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 93. In truth, Sacagawea only takes up a small portion of the novel—which gives a long account to pre and post-expedition. Judith Clark, William Clark's wife, actually has the largest female role. Dye still considered Sacagawea, however, to be her great heroine—partly due to the great enthusiasm with which her audience accepted the young Shoshone mother's character.

Dye's time are likely to be more conservative than modern readers expect.¹¹ Dye herself saw no need to abolish gender roles in the quest for equality. Instead, she understood the distinctly female experience of motherhood to be woman's exceptional contribution to society and wanted it to be recognized as such. A poem written by Dye in her mid-twenties illustrates this mindset:

What becomes of the college girl
The girl of mother-heart?
At the cradle side she kneels with pride
Her willing hands by love are tied
To life's divinest art.¹²

From this poem, we see that Dye believes motherhood to be an inherent part of a woman's soul—one that she cannot easily break away from ("her willing hands by love are tied"). She also elevates the experience of motherhood to the pinnacle of life's various capacities ("life's divinest art"), and in doing so gives women a rightful place in the significant workings of the world. The empowering nature of motherhood is a common theme among women suffragists of Dye's time, well-exemplified by the famous Oregon suffragette Abigail Scott Duniway.¹³ It is important to remember this in any discussion of Dye's portrayal of Sacagawea.

Here, it is also important to discuss Dye's conception of the West. Like many young couples in the late 1800's, Dye and her husband moved west to Oregon from Illinois in 1890. She lived in a time when the ideas of westward expansion and manifest destiny prevailed as the dominant narrative of the American West. Exemplifying her idea of America as a grand and growing empire, Dye wrote in 1880:

In the race of Progress we have leaped beyond the Greeks...Mountains lift their peaks,
rivers roll in grandeur, and our plains stretch away unmentioned yet in history...No song

¹¹ Gail H. Landsman, "The 'Other' as Political Symbol: Images of Indians in the Woman Suffrage Movement," *Ethnohistory* Vol. 39, No. 3 (Summer 1992). See for a thorough overview of historiography of feminist politics. She explains that, in 1902, few women argued for complete equality between the sexes. Most suffragists argued instead for equality between the women's and men's spheres—not an abolishment of the spheres themselves.

¹² Browne, *Eva Emery Dye*, 88. Quoted from Eva Emery Dye, "The College Girl," from *Oregon Teachers Monthly* (Hutchinson collection.).

¹³ Abigail Scott Duniway, "Oregon's Fortieth Anniversary," in *Path Breaking: An Autobiographical History of the Equal Suffrage Movement in Pacific Coast States* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 152. Duniway calls Joaquin Miller's poem "The Mothers of Men" the "grandest poem that...has ever been written" from a woman's point of view. The poem begins: "The bravest battle that ever was fought!/ Shall I tell you where and when?/ On the maps of the world you will find it not—/'Twas fought by the mothers of men."

immortal has bodied forth our western world, no poet has stood on high and grasped the grandeur of our empire.¹⁴

Implicit in Dye's understanding of her place in the West are the ideals of rapid progress ("the race") and domination over the natural world (the "plains stretch" and "mountains lift their peaks" for human endeavors). As a woman of her time and culture, she believed wholeheartedly in the idea of white America as a divinely inspired project of civilization on Earth. And just as she laments that "no poet" had yet "grasped the grandeur" of America, she creates for herself a literary niche to fill. Dye's forthcoming works, including *The Conquest*, must be understood as her "song immortal" in celebration of American empire.

Cindy Koenig Richards, a scholar of women's political rhetoric, explains the complex broader context into which *The Conquest* was published in 1902. People in the relatively new states of Oregon and Washington faced a greatly uncertain future, one in which they had to confront the daunting projects of "consolidating the frontier tradition with national culture" and "developing a regional identity." The American West was grappling with how to transition smoothly from a frontier region to a fully-functioning national space. Dye's life and work fits snugly into this transformation, and more particularly in the negotiation "of women" into "the public realm."¹⁵ Her idealized Sacagawea—a courageous and civilizing mother—is a leading model in this negotiation of women's identity in the West. Here the complexity of Dye's Sacagawea creation begins to emerge—for although the Shoshone woman was certainly a mother, she was undeniably not white.

The Civilizing Mother

As it is important to first understand where the myth began before exploring *how* its implications have played out, we will now turn to Dye's Sacagawea heroine as she was meant to be perceived by a 1902 audience. I will begin with a discussion of Sacagawea's motherhood as a

¹⁴ Browne, *Eva Emery Dye*, 72. As quoted from Eva L. Emery, "Poet of the Future," (n.d. Hutchinson collection).

¹⁵ Cindy Koenig Richards, "Inventing Sacagawea: Public Women and the Transformative Potential of Epideictic Rhetoric," *Western Journal of Communication* Vol. 73, No.1 (2009), 4.

civilizing agent among men in the wilderness, and then explore how Dye moves her civilizing heroine into the atypical role of overland guide upon whom the men of the expedition depended.

Our introduction to Sacagawea, besides a brief mention of her in a description of Fort Mandan, is at the birth of her first child. This defining moment in her life comes not long in the text after Lewis and Clark arrive at Fort Mandan for their first winter encampment:

Now barely sixteen, in that February at the Mandan fort she became a mother. Most of the men were away on a great hunting trip; when they came back a lusty little red-faced papoose was screaming beside the kitchen fire. The men had walked thirty miles that day on ice and in snow to their knees, but utterly fatigued as they were, the sight of that little Indian baby cuddled in a deerskin robe brought back memories of home.¹⁶

Here, Sacagawea and her baby are comforting because they are nostalgic. A mother and child next to the fire remind the men of their own domestic lives—whether is be as a small boy or as a husband and father. Implicit within this nostalgia are the ideas of domesticity and comfort. In this way, Sacagawea's character is immediately connected with a positive, influencing motherhood—and is rarely mentioned independently of her infant son throughout the rest of the novel.

At the same time as establishing her character's identity as strongly comforting, Dye creates a personal connection between Sacagawea and her audience. Considering that most had a mother figure of their own, the readers of *The Conquest* will understand the soothing presence of Sacagawea and her baby at Fort Mandan. In this way Dye propagates the idea of comforting mother as a naturally heroic woman, a common pro-women's suffrage approach in the West.¹⁷ Not just a comforting figure for the men of the Corps back from a long day of walking, Sacagawea provides a model for how mothers in general can be seen as heroic—especially those who added a comforting presence during the hard realities of westward expansion.

Jumping ahead in the plot, Sacagawea is presented outright as a civilizing agent in the Pacific Coast wilderness. In one of the few excerpts written as a window into the Shoshone

¹⁶ Eva Emery Dye, *The Conquest: The True Story of Lewis and Clark* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Company, 1902), 197.

¹⁷ Duniway, "Oregon's Fortieth Anniversary," 144-155. In an 1890 speech commemorating the 40th anniversary of Oregon's statehood, Abigail Scott Duniway uses very similar rhetoric to promote women's equality.

character's mind, Sacagawea contemplates the simple happiness of being a mother while remaining unaware of its greater implications:

All day the firelight flickering on Sacajawea's hair, as she sat making moccasins, crooning a song in her soft Indian monotone. This was, perhaps, the happiest winter Sacajawea ever knew, with baby Toussaint toddling around her on the puncheon floor, pulling her shawl around his chubby face, or tumbling over his own cradle. The modest Shoshone princess never dreamed of how the presence of her child and herself gave a touch of domesticity to that Oregon winter.¹⁸

Here, Dye more openly presents a model for the prototypical American pioneer mother.

Sacagawea and her baby's presence allow the winter to be more bearable for the Corps. The infant behaviors of baby Toussaint are cute and endearing. Her feminine presence, from the flickering hair to the sewing to the singing, brings a certain soft, gentle element to the wilderness that simply cannot exist without a woman. She left a lasting imprint on the West with her "touch of domesticity," as many pioneer mothers did.

As Dye writes the Lewis and Clark Expedition through the land between the Rockies and the Pacific, she utilizes the idea of the heroic mother to downplay potential threats and illustrate how the influence of the female sphere subtly protects men from danger. Riding her horse along the Columbia with her baby on her back, she "found friends with every tribe...The Indian mother-heart opened to Sacajawea. Her very presence was an assurance of pacific intention."¹⁹ It is significant to point out that Dye only portrays other Indian women as feeling a transcendental connection to Sacagawea and her child. It is "the women" who crowd "around Sacajawea and [untie] her baby from its elkskin cradle." It is the women who give him food and "little garments."²⁰ Here, Dye is targeting the female experiences of childbearing and childrearing to garner a strong identity among women—and further, to show how motherhood powerfully shapes the lives of men. According to this portrayal of cross-cultural contact, the female experience of motherhood is the chief instrument in diffusing the possibility of violence in a predominantly male world. With her baby, Sacagawea forges a safe path for her male

¹⁸ Dye, *The Conquest* 245.

¹⁹ Dye, *The Conquest*, 232.

²⁰ Dye, *The Conquest*, 232.

counterparts through potentially threatening land. Mothers create the necessary conditions for peace, a primary element in the development of civilization.

Dye's Sacagawea does not remain for long solely in the accepted "feminine" role of mother. From the starting point of a peace-cultivating mother figure, Dye continues to thrust her heroine into realms and roles that early twentieth century women less frequently entered—most notably, that of overland guide. Sacagawea is first put in the role of guide not long after the idea of motherhood is introduced—in fact, she is still laying ill post-childbirth. Dye describes how

the Captains watched her recovery with interest. All winter they had sought an interpreter for those far-away tongues beyond the mountains, and no one could be found but Sacajawea...Poor little Sacajawea! She was really very ill. If she died who would unlock the Gates of the Mountains?²¹

Here, Dye interestingly blends a pitiful, almost paternalistic description of Sacagawea with the bold claim that she holds the capability of leading the expedition over the Rockies—as well as providing communication with tribes beyond the mountains. In essence, Dye presents Sacagawea as the main lifeline of the expedition with two invaluable skills—language and navigation. Yet she is also "poor" and "little," having been weakened by the labor of childbirth.

Pairings of typical feminine roles with atypical ones is a continual theme throughout the novel—a technique which makes Dye's more radical assertions seem less radical, and creates an almost ironic balance of acceptable contradiction. Consider how the following passage also illustrates the way in which the acceptability of motherhood tempers the less acceptable role of guide:

Out of Ross Hole Sacajawea pointed the way by Clark's Pass, over the Continental Divide, to the Big Hole River where the trail disappeared or scattered. But Sacajawea knew the spot... On her little pony, with her baby on her back, the placid Indian girl led the way into the labyrinthine Rockies.²²

Dye ensures that the continual presence of a baby on the heroine's back does not escape the audience—especially when she is in a traditionally masculine role. It is also significant to note

²¹ Dye, *The Conquest*, 197.

²² Dye, *The Conquest*, 283.

that Sacagawea remains “placid”—not wild, aggressive or bold. She continues to hold the same tone Dye associates with universal motherhood—unwavering peace and comfort.

As the expedition prepares to leave Sacagawea and her husband Charbonneau behind at Fort Mandan, Dye offers an extensive tribute to the Shoshone woman and leaves no lingering doubt about Sacagawea’s primary role:

Sacajawea...heroine of the great expedition, stood with her babe in arms and smiled upon them from the shore. So had she stood in the Rocky Mountains pointing out the gates. So had she followed the great rivers, navigating the continent.²³

In her final farewell, Sacagawea is again depicted with her infant son—in her constant maternal role. With a baby in her care, she is fully depicted as “heroine,” as the trans-continental leader of the expedition. Here, we can most clearly see the effective symbolism Dye has created with her Sacagawea. She writes into narrative a situation where a group of historically courageous men heavily rely upon a woman for comfort, safety, and leadership. Since many pioneer wives crossed the continent with children in tow, they deserve the same heroic status as men in the narrative of westward expansion.

Erasing Race

What appears most readily in Dye’s depiction of Sacagawea is the notion of heroic mother. Dye creates a model of civilizing influence, crafting a place for women in the narrative of the male-dominated frontier West by arguing that, as Sheri Bartlett Browne points out in her biography of Dye, motherhood provides the most “normality in a strange environment.”²⁴ But, considering Dye’s understanding of the West as a white American project, how exactly does a native woman come to represent Dye’s model heroine for woman’s conquest of the West?

The irony of this question is better understood in the context of Dye’s understanding of native peoples’ place in a white-settled West. In an excerpt from the post-expedition narrative of *The Conquest*, Dye exclaims

The Indian? He fought and was vanquished. How we are beginning to love our Indians, now that we fear them no longer! ...We might have tamed him but we had not the time.

²³ Dye, *The Conquest*, 290.

²⁴ Browne, *Eva Emery Dye*, 90.

The movement was too swift, the pressure behind made the white man drivers as the Indian had driven before.²⁵

So, again, how does “vanquished” Indian –whose own lifestyle was inevitably bowled over by the “swiftness” of superior white civilization as according to Dye—come to represent the ideal, civilizing woman of the West?

One hint at how Dye may have overlooked Sacagawea’s heritage lies in the fact that her image of the “vanquished” Indian is masculine. As Browne asserts, “Dye embraced the idea that women were intrinsically important to the nation’s development, and she subsumed Sacagawea’s race under a veneer of whiteness-by-association that made her a convincing emblem of civilization.”²⁶ The issue, however, is more complex than this as Dye does not make the same allowance to other native women. Also, Dye does not include Sacagawea as “civilized,” even while making a concerted effort to distance the Shoshone mother from her “savage” heritage.²⁷ Through a denial of identity as neither savage nor civilized, Sacagawea becomes a transcendent, civilizing female being whose metaphorical and mythological worth is deemed more important than an open acknowledgement of her a race.

I will first cover the ways in which Dye attempts to distance Sacagawea from other native identities in the narrative, beginning with a separation from other native women. The first mention of Sacagawea comes in her introduction as one of Charbonneau’s wives. His first wife is the “a leathery old dame,” as compared to “the handsome young Sacajawea, the Bird-woman.”²⁸ From the first, then, Sacagawea is presented in much different—and superior—terms than other native women. Although this is a comparison to just one other native woman, our first impression of Sacagawea is immediately contrasted to another, less appealing, native

²⁵ Dye, *The Conquest*, 442.

²⁶ Browne, *Eva Emery Dye*, 94.

²⁷ Kessler, *The Making of Sacagawea*, 88. See for a similar argument: “By differentiating between savagery and civilization, for example, Dye defines two mutually exclusive categories. Although she consciously excludes Sacagawea from the ranks of savagery, neither does Dye portray Sacagawea as civilized,” what Kessler defines as an “ambiguous situation.” I intend to expand upon this argument with the claim that Sacagawea occupies a third state that transcends definition of savage/civilized.

²⁸ Dye, *The Conquest*, 188.

woman. It is significant to note that Sacagawea's youthfulness and beauty are key parts of her superior identity.

Dye makes even further effort to separate Sacagawea from other native women. In an explanation of the lives of Pacific coast women, Dye gives insight into their lifestyle: "Every squaw habitually carried a knife...With it she dug roots, cut wood, meat, or fish, split rushes for her flag mats and baskets, and fashioned skins for dresses and moccasins." She ends the description with praise in her tone: "Ever busy they were, the most patient, devoted women in the world."²⁹ Although this may seem like an ethnographical tribute to these native women, Dye instead uses it as a way to enhance the status of Sacagawea: "with her beautiful dress and a husband who sometimes carried the baby, [she] was a new sort of mortal on this Pacific coast."³⁰ Again, her aesthetic appearance is significant to her difference ("beautiful dress"). Also, Charbonneau's domesticated role ("husband who sometimes carried the baby") is of note.³¹ Sacagawea is a mother and wife whose relationship to her family is liberating. Keeping Dye's cultural context in mind, this is less of a commentary on egalitarian marriage roles and more a technique to compare Sacagawea with other native women whose hard-working nature is a symbol of their "savagery."³² Perhaps most significant, Dye uses this comparison to elevate Sacagawea to a transcendent status among Indian women—"a new sort of mortal on this Pacific coast," one who is clearly not intended to occupy the same status as other native people.

Dye also takes the time to distance Sacagawea from the state of native peoples in general. When Sacagawea first looks upon the Pacific Ocean, Dye explains her as, "save Pocahontas, the most traveled Indian Princess in our history." The author also gives another rare insight into

²⁹ Dye, *The Conquest*, 252.

³⁰ Dye, *The Conquest*, 252.

³¹ In Dye's narrative, Charbonneau is forced to carry the child as punishment for treating Sacagawea badly. Here perhaps Dye's more progressive feminist side coming out in a fiction where she is allowed to make the rules. Since it is a *punishment* however, it seems to conflict with her idea of motherhood as empowering—unless she sees it as solely a woman's empowering role. For men, it is disgraceful.

³² Scharff, "Seeking Sacagawea," 19. This viewpoint Dye gleaned from the Lewis and Clark journals, and stems from "the Enlightenment belief that women's work provided a marker of a society's evolution from savagery to civilization; the more physical effort women were expected to exert, the lower the society on the evolutionary scale."

her character's mind: as she looked out over the ocean, she "spoke not a word, but looked with calm and shining eyes upon the fruition of her hopes. Now she could go back to the Mandan towns and speak of things [they] had never seen, and of the Big Water beyond the Shining Mountains."³³ Dye pays tribute to Sacagawea's experience as a traveler, comparing her knowledge of the world to the natives back at Fort Mandan. Sacagawea's very life experience elevates her above other native people—although the same could certainly be said about most whites in the East, many of whom had never and would never see the Pacific Ocean.

Dye also includes an episode to distance Sacagawea from the potential threat that native people posed. On their way west across the Great Plains, the expedition looked for the Shoshone people to give them food, shelter, and horses. This excerpt comes just before Sacagawea is reunited with her tribe:

Lewis picked up a moccasin. "Here Sacagawea, does this belong to your people?" The Bird-Woman shook her head. "No Shoshone." She pointed to the north where the terrible Blackfeet came swooping down to shoot and scalp. It was time to hasten on."³⁴

Dye does not allow the threat of Indian violence to lay dormant. Here, we can hearken back to the discussion of Sacagawea's pacifying influence on the tribes along the Columbia—for the very mention that the tribes exhibited a potential threat acts in the same way. Dye is making a very subtle distinction between Sacagawea and the existing tribes of the West. By acknowledging the threat of violence, she creates a category of "savagery" that all tribes may potentially inhabit. Sacagawea is never part of this category, and, in fact, often sits diametrically opposite in a position of peace—and subsequently, in a space completely separate from the native identity.

Even though she separates Sacagawea into a category apart from "savage" Indians, Dye does not craft for her a new, white identity. When she first recognizes an abandoned Shoshone camp Sacagawea, stirred with excitement, yells, "My people! My people!" pointing out "deserted wickiups and traces of fires," and reveling in her return to her childhood landscape. At the same moment, Dye gives insight into Clark's decidedly white experience: "Little did [he] realize

³³ Dye, *The Conquest*, 251.

³⁴ Dye, *The Conquest*, 215.

that nuggets lay scattered all over that land, where yet the gold hunters should dot the hills with shafts and mounds; that near a beautiful city, named for Helen of Troy, should arise to become a golden capital.”³⁵ Clearly, here, Sacagawea’s story is not one of civilization. Dye separates the narrative of the future Montana state capital from Sacagawea, and instead enters Clark’s sphere in her discussion of future white progress. Sacagawea remains connected backwards with her Shoshone narrative, whereas Clark is given access to the future of white civilization.

On the journey back east, Dye further separates Sacagawea from the trajectory of white progress. As the expedition crosses the mountains on the “Great Shoshone highway,” Sacagawea is reminded of her childhood: “Many a summer had [she]...ridden on the trailing travois through this familiar gateway into the buffalo haunts of Yellowstone Park.”³⁶ The “swift,” impending future of white progress overrides Sacagawea’s experience—as Yellowstone Park’s existence is applied to her memories.³⁷ Here, again, Dye connects Sacagawea into the past with her Shoshone heritage while deferring to a superior white narrative of the future.

Elevated above native identity, yet not given full status in the narrative of civilization, Sacagawea occupies a place that transcends—and perhaps for Dye, even connects—the discordantly opposing, yet very real, ideas of “savagery” and “civilization.” As historian Jan Dawson argues, Dye is perhaps “searching for new ways to understand the complex history of white settlement in Indian lands” with her Sacagawea character.³⁸ Wrestling with how to include her native heroine into the larger narrative of woman’s conquest of the West, she constructs an entirely new place for Sacagawea—perhaps best exemplified by this passage:

Sacagawea’s hair was neatly braided, her nose was fine and straight, and her skin pure copper like the statue in some old Florentine gallery. Madonna of her race, she had led the way to a new time. To the hands of this girl, not yet eighteen, had been instructed the key that unlocked the road to Asia.”³⁹

³⁵ Dye, *The Conquest*, 221.

³⁶ Dye, *The Conquest*, 285.

³⁷ Richard Brandon et al., “Conservation,” in *Encyclopedia of American History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 65. Organized exploration of Yellowstone did not begin until the 1860’s, and it was not declared a National Park until 1872.

³⁸ Browne, *Eva Emery Dye*, 92. Quoted originally from Jan C. Dawson, “Pilot or Pioneer Mother?” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* Vol. 83, No. 1 (January 1992).

³⁹ Dye, *The Conquest*, 290.

Defined by both her copper-skin and a classical European beauty worthy of an Italian museum (“like the statue in some old Florentine gallery”), Sacagawea is neither completely white nor native. She occupies a space somewhere in between a white and native ethno-cultural heritage.

Here, Dye’s reference to Asia is an allusion to the burgeoning trans-Pacific economy at the turn of the century (“To the hands of this girl...had been instructed the key that unlocked the road to Asia”). As the western frontier was official declared “closed” by census records of 1890 and by historian Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893,⁴⁰ expansion across the Pacific to Asia became an integral part of new manifest destiny rhetoric. In her transcendent state, Sacagawea is given the capacity to introduce the West, and beyond, to civilization. This distinction is incredibly important for Dye’s narrative, as it gives a woman the credit for catalyzing the development of western America. As the rapid progress of manifest destiny was a highly valued cultural triumph, this was certainly an empowering concept for women of Dye’s time.

It is important to ask the question, though—at what cost? Sacagawea is the “Madonna” of her race while at the same time distanced from it. Dye’s conception of American past, present, and future leaves little room for non-white experience. Cutting Sacagawea off from her own heritage, Dye sets up a model heroine who drifts in a space without connection to reality. The experience of the young Shoshone mother of many names is effectively silenced.

Silencing

Perhaps the most pressing question is, exactly what experience does Dye silence with her account in *The Conquest*? As Richards observes, “even the most factual understanding of Sacagawea’s life could be summarized in less than a page.”⁴¹ A scholar of Sacagawea must come to terms with the fact that she is, on the whole, silent. Dye’s account, therefore, includes much embellishment. This section will provide a discussion in two parts—first, to shed light on

⁴⁰ Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier to American History,” in *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1962).

⁴¹ Richards, “Inventing Sacagawea,” 5.

aspects of Sacagawea's experience that Dye gives no voice at all; and second, to correct assumptions and assertions in *The Conquest* that are based in error.

Our introduction to Sacagawea is as Charbonneau's wife, "the beautiful Indian captive stolen beyond the Rockies."⁴² Then we are brought to her in child labor, which Dye presents as the defining moment in Sacagawea's life. It is assumed, then, that the Shoshone woman's life up until the arrival of Lewis and Clark, and her baby boy, is of little importance. Even though Dye is aware of her capture and enslavement ("Indian captive stolen beyond the Rockies"), she plasters a façade over the experience with one euphemistic adjective ("*beautiful* Indian captive stolen beyond the Rockies"). Although little is known about her early life,⁴³ Sacagawea's status as a slave is irrefutable. As Thomas Slaughter observes in his chapter on Sacagawea,

her status as a slave, her family's obvious lack of involvement in the transaction, and the absence of a solemnizing ritual better define her status as "slave" than as "wife" ...the story works better mythically, though, if a slave turns into a wife and an Indian maid into a princess, so that is what our history does."⁴⁴

As he points out—and as we saw in the sections of motherhood and transcendence—Dye's transformation of Sacagawea from slave to wife to princess was a process deeply impacted by the author's own understanding of femininity and the West. I will spend some time here, however, delving into the ways in which Dye strays from a factual account of Sacagawea.

Dye does not cover up the fact that her young Shoshone heroine was sold to her husband. One of Charbonneau's only lines, in fact, is in reference to Sacagawea: "She my slave...I buy her from de Rock Mountain. I make her my wife."⁴⁵ Dye's creative license takes a turn away from fact, however, concerning Charbonneau's treatment of his slave and Sacagawea's own conception of her enslavement. According to Dye, Charbonneau "had been kind to the captive Indian girl, and her heart clung to the easy-going Frenchman as her best friend." This depiction silences a fact that Dye certainly would have read while perusing the Lewis and Clark journals—

⁴² Dye, *The Conquest*, 193.

⁴³ Slaughter, "Porivo's Story," 87. See for a summary of Sacagawea's life from birth to the departure of the expedition from Fort Mandan.

⁴⁴ Slaughter, "Porivo's Story," 104. For an extended discussion of marriage and slavery between trappers and native women, see pages 103-104.

⁴⁵ Dye, *The Conquest*, 188.

that Charbonneau frequently beat his Shoshone wife to such an extent that Clark himself felt the need to interfere in the abuse.⁴⁶ Dye, perhaps attempting to reconcile this in her head, ends the above excerpt with the assertion that even “the worst white man was better than an Indian husband.”⁴⁷

The anti-Indian-male sentiment is prevalent throughout *The Conquest*. At the Shoshone camp, when Sacagawea is reunited with a friend from childhood, they “as girls will, with arms around each other,” wandered off “and talked and talked of the wonderful fortune that had come to Sacagawea, the wife of a white man.”⁴⁸ By assuming Sacagawea’s eagerness to be Charbonneau’s wife, Dye chooses to ignore an intriguing question in Sacagawea’s story—when she was reunited with family and friends at the Shoshone camp, why did she not stay and leave her abusive husband? The answer lies perhaps in her status as a slave. As Clara Sue Kidwell explains, “as a captive and wife of a white man, she no longer had a place within the social structure of her tribe.”⁴⁹ She was, in essence, a marginal figure between the Shoshone and the white men of the expedition. In this way, perhaps the racial un-rendering rhetorically crafted by Dye in *The Conquest* was an actual reality experienced by Sacagawea in her lifetime. Second, and most significant, Dye perpetuates racial prejudice and consciously chooses to silence a story of abuse in the construction of her ideal narrative of women and the West.

Not all of Dye’s account gives Sacagawea a passive role. On the contrary, the Dye crafts a character whose strong actions and thoughts have powerful meaning for Western women. With this creative license, however, Dye often chooses to give Sacagawea a voice that ignores her actual experience. Again, the question may arise—what *was* Sacagawea’s actual experience?

In reality, we probably know much less than we think we do. The largest body of recorded evidence on the Shoshone woman who accompanied the Corps of Discovery—and

⁴⁶ Slaughter, “Porivo’s Story,” 104. Thomas Slaughter documents one instance in the journals where Clark writes, “I checked our interpreter for striking his woman at their dinner.” He also references other instances of this nature present in the expedition journals.

⁴⁷ Dye, *The Conquest*, 196-7.

⁴⁸ Dye, *The Conquest*, 227.

⁴⁹ Clara Sue Kidwell, “Indian Women as Cultural Mediators,” *Ethnohistory* Vol. 39, No. 23 (1992), 101.

Dye's sole source in the creation of her character—is the many editions of the expedition journals. As Donna Kessler points out, even these journals are not a wholly trustworthy source as “the diarists and editors most often employ vocabulary and images of savagism to describe Sacagawea...displaying their immersion in culturally mandated conceptions.”⁵⁰ In other words, the journals portray Sacagawea through the eyes of educated, white American men—not as she saw herself, nor as other native men and women saw her.

Although there are many instances in the journals where Sacagawea's experience is refracted and transformed through the eyes of a white man, most important to note here is the fact that Sacagawea is rarely mentioned in the journals by name. As Slaughter observes,

of about 130 references to her in the journals, only 11 are by name... Only Lewis and Clark, among the five journalists, ever name her... Even York and Seaman are usually named...so her identity is personalized less frequently than those of Clark's slave and Lewis's dog.⁵¹

She is, instead, referred to most commonly as “our squaw,” “our Indian woman,” “our translator's wife,” “Charbonneau's squaw,” “the Frenchman's squaw,” “one of [Charbonneau's] wives,” and “his woman.”⁵² Noticing the significant emphasis on ownership of Sacagawea, it becomes clear how difficult it is to craft an honest portrayal of her voice from the journals. The only recorded evidence of her is from a perspective that takes little of her character and experience into account. For the remainder of the discussions, it is best to keep in mind Virginia Scharff's claim that

tracing indigenous women in the nineteenth century means...coping with white writer's racial and gender stereotyping, cultural blindness, and desire to imagine a country they desired not as people but as empty.⁵³

Although Scharff is referring particularly to the Lewis and Clark journals, the above passage is also applicable to Dye's conception of her Shoshone heroine—both because she based her Sacagawea character upon the journals and because she perpetuates a silencing of the Shoshone

⁵⁰ Kessler, *The Making of Sacagawea*, 5.

⁵¹ Slaughter, “Porivo's Story,” 102.

⁵² Slaughter, “Porivo's Story,” 102.

⁵³ Scharff, “Seeking Sacagawea,” 12-13. Kidwell, “Indian Women as Cultural Mediators,” 98 offers a similar observation.

woman's actual experience with early twentieth century "gender stereotyping" and "cultural blindness." I, too, cannot pretend to make any claims about her internal experience. I can, however, use the lens of the journals to understand the external circumstances that impacted her life. My purpose is to uphold the few facts we do know in the face of fierce embellishing forces like Eva Emery Dye.

Perhaps the most significant assumption of Dye is her heroine's willing and eager participation in the cultural and physical "Opening of the West"—as the influx of white values and settlements in the nineteenth West has come to be called. One quote from *The Conquest* suffices in providing an example of this attitude:

Some day upon the Bozeman Pass, Sacajawea's statue will stand beside that of Clark. Some day, where the rivers part, her laurels will vie with those of Lewis. Across North America a Shoshone Indian princess touched hands with Jefferson, opening her country.⁵⁴

Here, Dye implies that Sacagawea was aware of the fact that her guidance of the Corps of Discovery across the Rockies would result in a wave of white settlers in the region. Dye implies that Sacagawea was not only aware of this, but happily obliging. The phrasing of "touching hands" with Jefferson—a very symbolic and powerful transcontinental gesture—even implies that Sacagawea had been a proponent of this "Opening" of her country to an alien civilization all along. If nothing else, Dye presents her as an active participant in a non-vocalized agreement with the American president—symbolically giving her consent for westward white expansion.

Here, I must take a moment to point out the fact that the journal writers of the expedition did not consider Sacagawea to be their guide. As Kidwell reminds us, the Shoshone woman "did not lead the Corps of Discovery." She is only recorded as recognizing "certain landmarks in the Bitterroot Mountains...to indicate what might lie ahead."⁵⁵ Although her contributions on trail were certainly appreciated, Sacagawea certainly did not attain a respected status as leader, as made apparent by her depersonalization and status as property in the eyes of

⁵⁴ Dye, *The Conquest*, 290.

⁵⁵ Kidwell, "Indian Women as Cultural Mediators," 101.

the journal writers. For Dye, however, Sacagawea-as-leader both in reality on trail and symbolically in her “Opening of the West” serves a more socially and politically effective role.

In her essay “Indian Women as Cultural Mediators,” Clara Sue Kidwell offers a good study of why this idea of native women as “openers” of the West is so persistent. As wives and mothers of trappers, “theirs was the more sustained and enduring contact with new cultural ways... In this way, Indian women were the first important mediators of meaning between the cultures of two worlds.”⁵⁶ Dye is certainly attached to this idea of woman as significant in westward expansion—this is something she is out to prove in *The Conquest*. Dye focuses, however, on Sacagawea as the first *receptor* of white settlement. Little mediation between native and white culture exists in her narrative. Perhaps Gail Landsman’s observation that “the Indian woman, in overcoming the deficiencies of her own culture, is a mediator between nature and civilization” fits better with Dye’s understanding of Sacagawea.⁵⁷

As Kidwell further explains, Dye’s decision to place Sacagawea in a prominent role of the narrative of western development has significant ethical complications because the associations between Indian women and white men “led finally to the loss of Indian land and to destructive changes in Indian culture.”⁵⁸ Here, we can linger for a moment on the perfect irony of the title of the work in question. Dye meant *The Conquest* to have a positive tone, one in celebration of a significant step towards the development and progress of the West. Today, we are more apt to see it as the complex, ethically-laden narrative of the systematic white conquest of tribal lands and natural environment over the course of several centuries.

It is an act of silencing, therefore, to attribute Sacagawea’s role in the Corps of Discovery to an active contribution to the opening of the West because her actions had striking implications for native peoples as well as whites.⁵⁹ It is not sufficient to define Sacagawea’s experience based on the white perspective, for this was not her perspective and certainly not

⁵⁶ Kidwell, “Indian Women as Cultural Mediators,” 97.

⁵⁷ Landsman, “The ‘Other’ as Political Symbol,” 273-274.

⁵⁸ Kidwell, “Indian Women as Cultural Mediators,” 97-98.

⁵⁹ Kidwell, “Indian Women as Cultural Mediators,” 98. As she explains of Indian women who played a role in opening the West, their actions “must interpreted in two cultures,” not solely by whites.

that of every person whom she encountered. Dye's *characterization of Sacagawea* is the creation of an Other whose experience serves to complement and enhance the narrative of white women in the West. Dye's account translates *Sacagawea's actual experience* as a young Shoshone mother as less than "Other"—as not valuable to our historical memory. Although one account survives heartily today in national myth, the other—more silent—account lingers on against the odds of history. Perhaps this is why Sacagawea remains a compelling figure for Americans. She is at once unknown and known.

Sacagawea Statue Association—Memorializing the Myth

The ideas put forth in *The Conquest* survived and flourished in the years after its publication. Sacagawea the heroic mother represented a meaningful character for a nation in which a major women's rights movement was in its early stages. Within three years, six more novels featuring Sacagawea in a prominent role on the Lewis and Clark Expedition were published.⁶⁰ There were almost immediate effects in Dye's home state of Oregon as well. Dye continued to promote her Sacagawea character, and brought her specifically into the realm of the women's suffrage campaign where she became a successful rallying-point for the cause.⁶¹ It is within this political context that we can trace the ways in which elements of her mythic status originating in *The Conquest* began to pervade national consciousness.

Before continuing, it is important to re-contextualize Dye's efforts within her cultural and political reality. Eva Emery Dye was an active member of the Portland Women's Club, a group devoted to "literary pursuits, music, and art" and interested in "self-improvement or 'culture.'"⁶² These women's clubs, which are thoroughly documented by Sandra Haarsager in

⁶⁰ Heffernan et al., "A Feminine Atlas ?" 113. The novels, by author and publication date, are Graeme Mercer Adam (1904), Katharine Chandler (1905), Ripley Hitchcock (1905), Agnes C. Laut (1904), William R. Lighton (1905), Olin Wheeler (1905).

⁶¹ David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 11. "Public historical imagery," such as this shared sense of Sacagawea's character, helps "disparate individuals and groups envision themselves as members of a collective with a common present and future."

⁶² Browne, *Eva Emery Dye*, 101. See for more information on Dye's involvement in Portland Woman's Club. A majority of the primary sources in Browne's monograph are taken from the Oregon Historical Society, where there is an entire collection dedicated to Eva Emery Dye's life. For more information on

Organized Womanhood: Cultural Politics in the Pacific Northwest, 1840-1920, provided a growing public sphere for woman to socialize with each other as well as the greater community through service and education projects. This growing public role served to strengthen their political and social faculties. It is into this community that Dye's Sacagawea figure is first disseminated.

A year after the publication of *The Conquest*, the Oregon history committee—"designed to increase women's cultural sophistication in...history"—began to read Dye's novel. The character Sacagawea deeply resonated with these women, and they decided to raise money to erect a statue in her honor at the upcoming Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition in 1905. Thus, the Sacajawea Statue Association was formed in the spirit of civic duty and promoting the equal suffrage cause.⁶³ A letter to potential donors explains that "it would be a beautiful and touching tribute for the women of today to pay, not alone to Sacajawea, but to the pioneer mother and to womanhood."⁶⁴ Dye's theme of the universal mother and the heroic woman were certainly not lost upon the women of Portland Woman's Club. Under these very themes, Sacagawea became a rallying point for their campaign—a model heroine for the cause of the women of the West.

By 1905, the club members had raised \$3,500 for the statue by appealing to women's sense of pride in their own history.⁶⁵ In commissioning the statue, the Sacajawea Statue Association had a very particular image of the Shoshone woman in mind to represent their ideal woman. A description taken from Cindy Koenig Richards reveals this image to have "sculpted" features conforming to "conventional Anglo-American standards of feminine beauty," offering "a regal vision of classical virtue in the New World; with its flowing robes, anglicized features,

Women's Clubs of the Northwest in general, see Sandra Haarsager, *Organized Womanhood: Cultural Politics in the Pacific Northwest, 1840-1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997).

⁶³ Browne, *Eva Emery Dye*, 104.

⁶⁴ Browne, *Eva Emery Dye*, 106. From an undated letter from Sarah A. Evans to donors (OHS Dye collection Box 2).

⁶⁵ Kessler, *The Making of Sacagawea*, 91. The Sacajawea Statue Association fundraised through "entertainments, festivals, concerts, suppers, bridge lessons." They "sold flowers, paintings, postcards, and Christmas stamps."

and raised arm, Sacajawea bore a resemblance to the goddess Columbia and to Lady Liberty.”⁶⁶ So, although she is meant to represent a historical figure, Sacagawea’s statue is—in reality—presented as more a mythic figure than a real one.

It is also important to note how this statue’s ideals of beauty can be traced back through *The Conquest*, especially resonant with this passage as discussed in the section on transcending notions of a savage/civilized dichotomy:

Sacagawea’s hair was neatly braided, her nose was fine and straight, and her skin pure copper like the statue in some old Florentine gallery. Madonna of her race, she had led the way to a new time. To the hands of this girl, not yet eighteen, had been instructed the key that unlocked the road to Asia.”⁶⁷

The statue is a reincarnated version of Dye’s tribute to Sacagawea on paper—Dye effectively wrote her heroine from the page to the streets of Portland with classical Anglo-American standards of physical beauty and suffrage values in tow. The statue of Sacagawea unveiled on July 6, 1905 in Portland reflected both beauty (“her nose was fine and straight...her skin pure copper”) and ideals of manifest destiny (“instructed the key that unlocked the road to Asia”), as she pointed the way even further westward for a new generation of women.⁶⁸

Modeling so similarly the character in Dye’s novel, the 1905 statue of Sacagawea represents the same themes of universal motherhood, a transcendence of savage/civilized, and a silencing of the Shoshone woman’s experience. To further illustrate this point, however, I will give a brief analysis of Eva Emery Dye’s speech from the dedication ceremony. The significance of looking beyond *The Conquest* lies in the fact that some scholars understand that “it was not

⁶⁶ Richards, “Inventing Sacagawea,” 11. Similar observations about the statue’s anglicized features and patriotic nature are found in Heffernan et al., “A Feminine Atlas?” 17; Wanda Pillow, “Searching for Sacagawea: Whiteness Reproductions and Endarkened Representations,” *Hypatia* Vol. 22, No. 2 (2007) 9.

⁶⁷ Dye, *The Conquest*, 290.

⁶⁸ Perhaps the significance of this particular image of Sacagawea (as regal, beautiful, and pointing westward) to the Sacajawea Statue Association is best described through this anecdote as relayed in Browne, *Eva Emery Dye*, 111: “Portland Sculptor Barrett proposed an idea of a stone fountain of Sacagawea to Fiar Commission...Barrett’s conception represented an entirely different Sacagawea than that proposed by the association. In February 1904, visitors to Woodard and Clark department store in downtown Portland could see his clay model. As Evans described it, “It’s a fright...The Figures are nude—sure a ‘fig leaf’ and the figures on the horse is sitting sideways with her naked legs crossed.” Clearly this was not at all what the statue association had in mind for its appreciation of pioneer womanhood.” It is significant to note here, however, that even though Dye’s version of Sacagawea as pioneer mother won this particular battle, the sexualized version of Sacagawea did live on as pointed out by Pillow, “Searching for Sacagawea,” 10-11: see Anna Lee Waldo’s *Sacagawea* (1978): 440, 504, 557-8.

the text itself that turned Sacagawea into an American icon but Dye's subsequent efforts to memorialize her with statues and speeches."⁶⁹ So although *The Conquest* certainly represents the foundation of many aspects of Sacagawea's myth, it is important to follow the text into the political and social realms into which it was brought to the public.

Addressing a crowd of thousands—including national suffrage figures Susan B. Anthony, Carrie Chapman Catt, and Abigail Scott Duniway⁷⁰—Dye explains the purpose of the statue:

The women of Oregon present this statue as a token that we have awakened. Forever in the City Park, on the trails her people travel no more, let Sacagawea stand, a reminder and inspiration to duty and to progress.⁷¹

Already we can see elements of *The Conquest* coming through. The reference to “duty and progress” reflects the values of motherhood and manifest destiny. There is an ambiguous connection between Sacagawea and both native people and white women—although the “women of Oregon present this statue,” Sacagawea stands upon “the trails her people travel no more” as both a relic of cultures past and a visionary for the future.

Again, it is necessary to stop for a moment here and take stock of the broader context in which Dye's ideas are presented. Present at this dedication is Abigail Scott Duniway, a powerful orator and Dye's fellow Oregonian suffrage leader considered by women of the time to be “the ultimate Western heroine” of the movement.⁷² Just as Dye utilized the idea of Sacagawea as a model for the courageous, respectable woman of the West, Duniway “urged her listeners to view White women as engaged in the frontier pilgrimage, thereby recognizing that women like men, had earned their citizenship.”⁷³ She, too, was culturally grounded in the narrative of manifest destiny.

⁶⁹ Browne, *Eva Emery Dye*, 4.

⁷⁰ Richards, “Inventing Sacagawea,” 1.

⁷¹ Richards, “Inventing Sacagawea,” 16-17. From Dye's speech, “Sacajawea Statue Dedication.”

⁷² Tiffany Lewis, “Winning Woman Suffrage in the Masculine West: Abigail Scott Duniway's Frontier Myth,” *Western Journal of Communication* Vol. 75, No. 2 (2011), 136.

⁷³ Lewis, “Winning Woman Suffrage in the Masculine West,” 133.

Duniway's understanding extends strongly into the way she conceptualized native/white relations in the West. She is known for her particularly vivid understanding of the Indian as "savage," well illustrated from this passage in one of her speeches in praise of woman's courage:

We cannot forget the faithful bravery of the lone woman in her rough log cabin in the beautiful hills of Southern Oregon, who, when her husband lay dead at her feet, from the treacherous aim of a cruel savage, kept the howling despoilers of her home at bay with her trusty rifle.⁷⁴

It is in this way that Duniway conceptualized "real western women" to be "separate from," and far superior to "American Indians."⁷⁵ With this example, she illustrates a battle of ideologies between the civilizing force of the white woman and the savage tendencies of the Indian man. Seemingly she left absolutely no room for native "savages" in her creation of the woman's American West.

It is in this context that Eva Emery Dye presents her speech. In terms of silencing, Dye perhaps does the most to ignore Sacagawea—and all native mothers—in claiming that the West was virtually devoid of culture before white mothers arrived. The full passage reads

Women are not by nature explorers and travelers, but where women go, homes can go, families can be reared, towns, cities, and states can be founded. Not until women came, could America take any secure hold in Oregon, and this great Pacific empire...Trappers had been here, traders and shipmasters had skirted these wilds, but not until mothers came was the true seed of a nation planted. And Sacajawea led them all, the dark eyed princess of her native race, the child of the Orient [who] beckoned the white man on, toward her ancient home.⁷⁶

This particular passage contains perhaps the most revealing text concerning Dye's understanding of Sacagawea amid the narrative of westward white expansion. First, Dye makes the assertion that women are a necessary component for civilization ("Where women go, homes can go, families can be reared, towns, cities, and states can be founded"). This certainly fits in with her claim of mother as civilizing agent, as seen with her depiction of Sacagawea and child amongst the men of the expedition. As Browne points out, "Women's shared experience of

⁷⁴ Duniway, "Oregon's Fortieth Anniversary," 148-149.

⁷⁵ Lewis, "Winning Woman Suffrage in the Masculine West," 141.

⁷⁶ Richards, "Inventing Sacagawea," 12. From Dye, "Sacajawea Statue Dedication."

motherhood allowed Dye to claim that Sacagawea represented all women who had trekked westward with their husbands and children in the nineteenth century.”⁷⁷

In that vein of thought, she then moves forward to apply this idea directly to the settlement of Oregon (“Not until women came could America take any secure hold in Oregon and this great Pacific empire”). This works to connect with all the women in her audience as her rhetoric helps them to understand their own place in the history of Oregon’s “civilization,” as well as their place in the future of international expansion as represented by the notion of a “great Pacific empire.” This is a technique Dye uses to create a place for women in the male-dominated narrative of the West. As Heffernan and Medlicot explain, “given the centrality of the frontier myth to the debate about the nature of American national identity, it was clearly important for American women activists to counter the impression that the West had been ‘won’ entirely through the actions of men.”⁷⁸ Dye’s character of Sacagawea is a perfect counter to this male-dominance.

From here, Dye uses rhetoric of silencing to make her argument. Although she acknowledges the presence of some white men in the West (“Trappers had been here, traders and shipmasters had skirted these wilds”), she completely discounts the existence of native peoples in the development of the West (“but not until mothers came was the true seed of a nation planted.”) This is most revealing if one thinks about the existence of native mothers in the West—clearly, Dye does not consider the native mothers of the coastal tribes as civilizing influences, as she leaves them out of her argument. It is into this narrative—devoid of meaningful native existence—that Dye brings Sacagawea. As one can imagine, this process involves a complex transformation of Sacagawea’s character, one already traced more in depth in *The Conquest*.

⁷⁷ Browne, *Eva Emery Dye*, 107.

⁷⁸ Heffernan et al., “Inventing Sacagawea,” 111. Also see Haarsager, *Organized Womanhood*, 6 for how club women created their own West: “Their West is found in their narratives, their papers, their club programs, their ideas and goals. Their West had spaces for women, homes, and community values expressed through social policies and cultural institutions.”

This transformation takes a slightly different form in the dedication speech than in the novel. Instead of placing Sacagawea in a third role between savage and civilized, Dye creates Sacagawea into what Thomas Slaughter calls “an idealized racial and gender Other,”⁷⁹ (“And Sacagawea led them all, the dark eyed princess of her native race, the child of the Orient [who] beckoned the white man on, toward her ancient home”). There is a major distinction between this characterization of Sacagawea, and that in *The Conquest*. Here she is very strongly over-characterized by her native heritage, rather than distanced from it. With her dark eyes, and a primordial connection to her “ancient home,” she is most certainly supposed to be Other—to the extent that her ethnicity is more closely related to Asia than to the American West.

Why does Dye characterize Sacagawea so differently in her 1902 novel than in this 1905 dedication speech? The answer can perhaps be found in the revealing phrase “this great Pacific empire.” Dye closely relates Sacagawea with her American native and ancient Asian heritage because it renders her culturally significant for the occasion. At the same time in Portland as the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition, the American Pacific Exposition and Oriental Fair was being held. Certainly, interest and curiosity towards Asia as the next great American frontier influenced Dye’s depiction of her Sacagawea character in this particular speech. By likening her as the native woman who “Opened the West,” and also as the Asian woman who symbolically “Opened Asia,” Dye effectively crafted a justification for both past American expansion into the West and future American expansion into Asia. Here, the character of Sacagawea is manipulated to play a powerful, double role.

This acknowledgment of her heritage does not give Sacagawea a voice, as Dye’s characterization of her Otherness is also embedded with early twentieth century white assumptions. Dye does nothing to show an interest in—let alone pay respect to—Sacagawea’s Shoshone or any other native culture. No effort is made to understand or appreciate Sacagawea’s actual experience. The depiction of Otherness effectively paints the native

⁷⁹ Slaughter, “Porivo’s Story,” 101.

experience into one sweeping category of the unknown—and leaves it at that. Sacagawea is significant because she actively brought white culture westward (“beckoned the white man on”). She is important only from the white perspective. The reality of her native heritage is just an unavoidable fact that is more interesting, and less complicated, when exoticized through Otherness.

Implications of Silencing

The effects of Dye’s silencing rhetoric make an interesting study when the Sacajawea Statue Association’s efforts are laid parallel with the experience of native peoples of the same time in Oregon. As Donna Kessler points out, no one involved in the statue’s commission noticed “the irony that this exclusively Euro-American crusade to honor a historical native woman occurred in a state populated by indigenous peoples who remained isolated on reservations. Natives took no part in the monument drive.”⁸⁰ This is explained by the perhaps obvious fact that Sacagawea’s statue was meant to memorialize white heroic pioneer womanhood—not as a celebration of native culture.

This explanation does not, however, erase nor explain the silencing processes inherent within Sacagawea’s incorporation into the white narrative of westward expansion. At the very moment Sacagawea’s statue was unveiled, native peoples of Northwest—most certainly tribes encountered by the Corps of Discovery—were being pushed to the fringes of a narrative that heralded white civilization and dominance. Their reality was being confined to the borders of an allotted land system—a process in which they had little say.

It is significant to note that the women’s clubs of the Northwest did often try to provide basic survival needs to the nearby native tribes. Their programs consisted of “practical attempts to clothe, feed, educate, and medicate them, especially the children.”⁸¹ The purpose of these projects was not to provide a permanent system of help—instead, they were seen as only a temporary solution. The eventual hope was that appropriate assimilation would provide “their

⁸⁰ Kessler, *The Making of Sacagawea*, 91.

⁸¹ Haarsager, *Organized Womanhood*, 185.

route to happiness.”⁸² From this, we can see that the understanding of a native role in the narrative of westward expansion had absolutely nothing to do with the existence, preservation, or celebration of their culture. It is in this way the Sacagawea’s memorial can come to have many meanings. In a twist of irony, we can change Dye’s speech to read: “Forever in the City Park, on the trails her people travel no more, let Sacagawea stand, a reminder not “to duty and to progress,” but to the silencing of indigenous cultures in favor of the white narrative of manifest destiny—the silencing of native peoples for the sake of “duty” and “progress.”

Conclusion

Eva Emery Dye’s construction of a Sacagawea character serves as a complex and revealing case for the study of history. Throughout a close analysis of *The Conquest* and the subsequent statue project, I often found myself thinking—what is an ethical and effective study of history? This question kept popping up because Dye’s asserts her portrayal of Sacagawea as historical—and was often celebrated as a great historical scholar. *The Conquest*, especially, was received well as a historical text even though Dye practiced a self-titled brand of “romantic” history.⁸³ In her own words, she describes her mindset towards historical authorship: “I see things too vividly to tie myself down to dead history. Living history is a romance, the people in action is what we want to see.”⁸⁴ For Dye, history is clearly best represented as a drama with colorful, relevant characters. She feels a sense of responsibility only to the interest of her readers, not to ethical representations of the past. Although this should be expected from an author, it is also important to turn a critical and discerning eye upon her work. For, Dye’s “romantic” rendering of Sacagawea as a more appealing social and political figure has an impact directly traceable through today. The image she created lives on in the form of a national myth.

⁸² Haarsager, *Organized Womanhood*, 186.

⁸³ Browne, *Eva Emery Dye*, 97. An anonymous reviewer in *Oregon Historical Quarterly*: “[Dye’s] spirit as an ardent hero-worshipper, her aptitude for biographical narrative, her keen zest for dramatic and historic conjunctions of time or place, her strongly feminine point of view so rarely applied to chapters of adventure, and above all her intense enthusiasm which fuses remotely related details into an integral whole—these make “The Conquest” a book useful to the student of history.”

⁸⁴ Browne, *Eva Emery Dye*, 97–98. “How Mrs. Dye Wrote *The Conquest*” (OHS Dye collection Box 4).

Many scholars today find very positive results in Dye's efforts—always in connection with the fact that she was able to bring women into the public spotlight. “Her effort to memorialize Sacagawea in *The Conquest* and at the exposition,” Browne writes in her biography of Dye, “became symbolic of a larger effort to legitimize the history of women and provide recognition for their deeds along with men.”⁸⁵ Along a similar line, Richards argues that Dye “validated the traditional experiences and activities of women as publicly valuable...[and] rhetorically constructed a tenable public identity for woman that emphasized her capacity to lead.”⁸⁶ What I observe about these arguments is that they shed light upon the fact that Dye's silencing of Sacagawea's voice was an instrumental part of creating a voice for many others. The advancement of the woman's rights movement in early twentieth century Oregon came at the sacrifice of one woman's right to voice. Is this an appropriate use of history, then, if one identity is sacrificed for the benefit of many others?

I cannot provide an answer to this question, although I can shed some light. First, it is not so simple as a silencing of *one* identity for the benefit of *many*. As shown in the discussion of the implications of Sacagawea's silence, attitudes about native people certainly influenced the experience and identity of many more native people than just Sacagawea. *The Conquest*, in fact, has more implications for the reality of native people in the twentieth century and beyond than it did for Sacagawea. She did not even live to see its publication nor the subsequent rise of her mythical status. The ideas in *The Conquest* also held implications for the conception of American identity in general, for they certainly helped shape people's understanding of Sacagawea, westward expansion, and the woman's role in the settlement of the West. This understanding helped inform the perpetuation of Sacagawea's myth throughout the century and beyond.

I started this paper with an image of a woman on a coin whose identity is written into the mythology of American nation-lore. Is it a fitting conclusion to point out that she, engraved

⁸⁵ Browne, *Eva Emery Dye*, 115.

⁸⁶ Richards, “Inventing Sacagawea,” 15.

permanently upon millions of little gold coins across America, is now the possession of Americans everywhere? The woman of many names is perhaps an appropriate title for the Shoshone mother who stands as a national mythic heroine, as she has come to represent many different things. She has been transformed into a pocket-sized trinket of which presumably any American can own. She is now a small face on a coin, an image to which many different characteristics—mythical and factual—can be applied. This certainly reflects the ownership of Sacagawea reflected by Lewis and Clark in their journals, as well as by Dye in her re-creation of the Shoshone woman to fit her own political and social needs. I would suggest that we have not come very far in our understanding or appreciation of her, either.

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